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ABSTRACT

This workplace skills course on communication is designed to build on the communications strategies at work course. The focus of the course is the importance of team building, reaching consensus, and conflict resolution as part of the communication process. Introductory material includes a course outline and course topics. The course consists of three sessions, each of which has these components: teacher tips, activities, worksheets, information sheets, and handouts. Topics covered in the sessions include the following: active listening and effective communication skills; assertively getting one's point across; understanding the difference between a work group and a team; how to support the problem solving efforts of the team; resolving conflict through communication and trust in the team; and skills to reach consensus and/or agreement. (YLB)

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Communications - The Next Step

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P.R.I.D.E.

PEOPLE RETRAINING for INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE

CE 070 171

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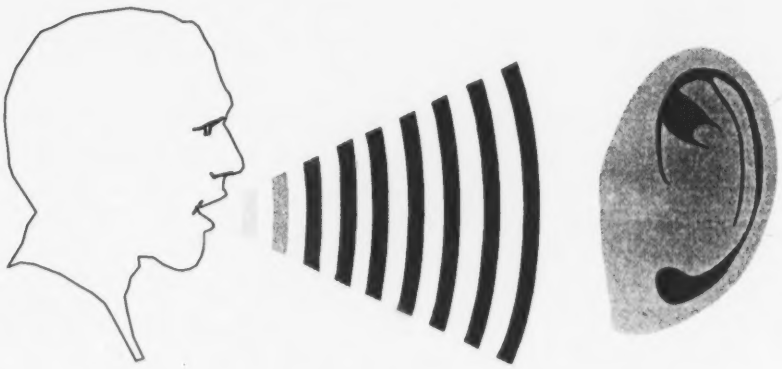
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Mercer County Community College thanks Ave Pollak, Senior Education Specialist/Curriculum Developer for creating this manual. Through her valuable contributions employees in manufacturing and service industries learned concepts relevant to their existing jobs and strategies for learning other tasks if that opportunity should arise.

Communications - The Next Step



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Elaine S. Weinberg
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National Workplace Literacy Program
1995

WORKPLACE SKILLS TRAINING PHILOSOPHY

A factory or service center creates a classroom that is very different from the one we are used to seeing in colleges and adult schools, so it only follows that our approach to teaching in the factory should also differ.

Our goal is to teach employees skills that they need in order to be functional and successful in their work environment, and encourage them to apply those skills on the job and at home. For example, we motivate students to do the following:

- work more efficiently and more safely
- make fewer mistakes
- solve problems working interactively
- take greater responsibility for their jobs
- recognize the interconnectedness of the various jobs in their workplace
- be better communicators in the workplace

Company needs are revealed through a needs assessment. At that time, we also determine the basic skills needs of the employees. We are learner centered, as the individual employee's needs are considered alongside those of the company.

Once we have determined those needs, we develop curricula that incorporate basic skills, using the workplace literature (e.g. forms, applications, codes, abbreviations, charts and tables, handbooks, regulations, procedures, policies, memos, letters) of the company. Because each company is different, the needs and literature are also different; hence, we develop new materials for every company in which we teach. By utilizing these workplace items, we help students transfer and apply their skills directly to their jobs.

We rely on the classroom techniques of problem solving, cooperative learning, and group discussion. Our overall approach is concept based, with the emphasis on application, such as in role plays, dialogues, and group work. Despite the specific course titles, we incorporate the elements of math, English, and communication skills into all of our sessions.

In terms of students evaluation, after initial testing we give a pre-test and post-test in order to determine comprehension. Students receive feedback throughout the course from the instructor, as well as from fellow students as we sincerely believe in the powerful positive reinforcement of peer critiques and cooperative exchanges.

In essence, we believe that although we make the materials for the students with which to work, it is the students who truly make the class.

COMMUNICATIONS – THE NEXT STEP TEAM BUILDING, REACHING CONSENSUS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

COURSE OUTLINE:

This course will build on the skills taught in our prior Communications course. As explored previously, we will continue to use listening, developing understanding and clarifying what one another means to keep constructive communication on track. Specifically, the importance of team building, reaching consensus and conflict resolution as part of the communication process will be the focus of this course.

COURSE TOPICS:

- Review active listening and effective communication skills
- Assertively getting your point across
- Understand the difference between a work group and a team – (Which operates in your work setting?)
- How to support the problem solving efforts of the team
- Resolving conflict through communication and trust in the team
- Skills to reach consensus and/ or agreement

COURSE DETAILS:

- Four sessions
- .8 C.E.U.

TEACHER TIPS ◆ SESSION 1

- Welcome and introductions
- Distribute course objectives and discuss; listen to participants' objectives
- Complete course registrations
- Opening exercise to warm up and lay the first building blocks of the course
- Review "Active Listening", " Effective Communications" (hand -out)
- "Quick review of communication skills" hand-out
- Worksheet – six benefits to good communication at work; complete individually and then continue worksheet directions in small group
- Review "Problem Solving Techniques" – hand-out

TEACHER TIPS ◆ SESSION 2

- "Focus on the Situation..." hand-out pages 1 and 2; discuss
- "Getting your point across" hand-out; discuss assertiveness and the skills involved
- Case Study – Henry, Ken and Mark (Save final process question on healthy/unhealthy conflict till Session 3)
- "What are the components to a good working team?" – pages 1 and 2; complete, discuss and tie into the actual work experiences of the participants
- "Work Group or Team" hand-out; discuss; pull in ideas shared by participants during the previous worksheet
- Team building exercise – follow directions as given
- "What is consensus?" hand-out; discuss
- Consensus building exercise – "What do people want from their jobs?"
- Complete worksheets; small and large group discussions

TEACHER TIPS ◆ SESSION 3

- Resolving issues with others – review key points
- Communicate constructively through conflict
- "Communication climate" pages 1 and 2
- "The nature of conflict" pages 1 and 2
- Complete role-play questions from Case study – Henry, Ken and Mark (Session. 2)
- Develop role-play situations
- Role-play
- Case Study – Mary Lou if there is time
- Course Wrap up and course evaluations

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE

The Art of *ACTIVE LISTENING*

The key to good listening is wanting to hear what the other person has to say. *Huh?*

Step 1 – overcome or reduce listening barriers

- try to keep your attention focused
- overcome distractions in the environment
- overcome the negative nature of the conversation
- bring your concentration back to listening
- don't drift off into your own thoughts about your response

Step 2 – practice these active listening skills

- encourage the expression of feelings
- listen for ideas and feelings
- notice attitudes and non-verbal cues
- give accurate and timely feedback
- carefully restate
- ask open-ended questions
- allow other person to fully express without interruptions
- withhold judgments or opinions
- avoids poor listening habits

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR THE WORKPLACE

Key Ingredients to Effective Communications

To send an accurate message:

- Own your message – Present how you feel, rather than how others make you feel. Placing blame causes people to put up defenses rather than be willing to look for a solution.
- Be specific – Make your message complete. Do not assume the receiver knows what you mean, or can fill in ideas you leave out.
- Avoid mixed messages – Send the same message verbally as non-verbally.
- Repeat your message – Repeating helps understanding and remembering.
- Get feedback – Ask the receiver to tell you what the message means.
- Describe behavior – Give specific examples of behavior without judging it.
- Overcome assumptions – Be aware of attitudes that may be interfering with the sending of your message.

To receive an accurate message:

- Check for understanding – Ask what the sender means or restate in your own words.
- Overcome assumptions – Be aware of attitudes that may be interfering with your ability to "receive" the message.
- Clearly understand before replying – The communication will get very confused if you respond to something different than what was meant.

A QUICK REVIEW OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS...

1. Messages you send are most easily understood when:
   (a) you choose words that show your wide ranging vocabulary.
   (b) the message is sent in terms the receiver understands.

2. Complex information is more easily understood when you:
   (a) use specific examples to be more clear.
   (b) tell the listener to pay careful attention.

3. Key concepts are better remembered when you:
   (a) use repetition as a way to reinforce them.
   (b) express yourself clearly.

4. Organizing a message before sending it:
   (a) often takes more time than it is worth.
   (b) makes it easier to understand.

5. The sender can determine the receiver's understanding by:
   (a) asking if he/she understands.
   (b) asking the receiver to repeat or paraphrase what he/she heard.

6. Listening is more effective when you:
   (a) concentrate on the sender and what is being said.
   (b) anticipate what the speaker is going to say.

7. Understanding is easier when you:
   (a) hold off making judgments until the speaker finishes.
   (b) assume you know the sender's position and judge accordingly.

8. Understanding can be improved by the listener:
   (a) by occasionally paraphrasing the message back to the sender.
   (b) interrupting to express feelings and emotions.

9. Good listeners:
   (a) have their response ready when the sender stops talking.
   (b) ask questions when they don't understand.

10. Sending and receiving are both enhanced when:
    (a) the people maintain good eye contact.
    (b) the parties are defensive and challenge one another.

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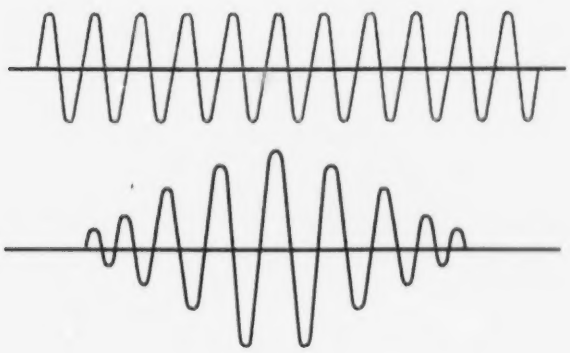
COMMUNICATIONS – THE NEXT STEP TEAM BUILDING, REACHING CONSENSUS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION



Research shows a positive connection between communication (understanding) and:

- improved productivity
- better problem solving
- a reduction in grievances
- ideas for improvement in methodology
- improved working relationships
- greater personal satisfaction

"HOW TO PUT IT INTO PRACTICE" WORKSHEET

As you look at the list of the six benefits to good communication at work, which **do you think occur here at work for you?**

Again, look at the list and brainstorm some suggestions for you, and for your supervisor to improve communication in your department.

Discuss in your small groups and practice HOW you might offer some suggestions to a co-worker or your supervisor. Give each other feedback and keep practicing until it feels/sounds right.

HOW DOES YOUR SUPERVISOR/MANAGER COMMUNICATE HER/HIS STYLE?

"I know best." This person feels work should be done by controlling the people who do it. Employees are told what to do, how to do it, and when to stop. Then they are told what they did wrong, and what they did right; where they are weak and where they are strong. The person in charge feels this is justified because of his or her superior knowledge and ability. This attitude does not invite new ideas, challenge people, or stimulate a cooperative, supportive spirit. Communication is directed one way only.

"I'll set the goals, you meet them." This person feels that because of his or her superior knowledge, ability or experience it is O.K. to establish goals for others to meet. The employee is given an opportunity to discuss ways to meet goals, but has no input into the actual performance objectives. When this happens commitment is more difficult to obtain from employees because their lack of involvement precludes a sense of ownership.

"Let's review the work together, establish more realistic goals and evaluate performance accordingly." This person emphasizes work performance, not authoritarian control. The idea is first to communicate organizational needs, then help team members contribute their ideas. The leader acts as a resource and enabler rather than as a judge. Communication is open and flows in both directions. The value of mutual support and cooperation is recognized and employed.

PROBLEM SOLVING TECHNIQUES

Step 1 – State what appears to be the problem.
The real problem may not surface until facts have been gathered and analyzed. Therefore, start with a supposition that can later be confirmed or corrected.

Step 2 – Gather facts, feelings and opinions.
What happened? Where, when and how did it occur? What is its size, scope and severity? Who and what is affected? Is it likely to happen again? Does it need to be corrected? Time and expense may require problem solvers to think through what they need, and assign priorities to the more critical elements.

Step 3 – Restate the problem.
The facts help make this possible, and provide supporting data. The actual problem may, or may not be the same as stated in step 1.

Step 4 – Identify alternative solutions.
Generate ideas. Do not eliminate any possible solutions until several have been discussed.

Step 5 – Evaluate alternatives.
Which will provide the optimum solution? What are the risks? Are costs in keeping with the benefits? Will the solution create new problems?

Step 6 – Implement the decision.
Who must be involved? To what extent? How, when and where? Who will the decision impact? What might go wrong? How will results be reported and verified?

Step 7 – Evaluate the results.
Test the solution against the desired results. Modify the solution if better results are needed.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN...

- you need to talk to someone about a touchy matter?
- you need to let someone know that they are not doing the job correctly?
- you have to let someone know that they are bothering you or other people?

Focus on the situation, issue or behavior, not on the person

Personal attack	vs.	*Focus on the facts*
"You are just not getting how we do things here. Don't you want to keep your job?"		"Although you've had some on the job training, it seems that you are not up to speed. You need to improve your speed and accuracy."

Offer your suggestions on the following:

"How can you expect a promotion when you act so childishly here?" _____

_____

_____

"Why do you always have to do things your way, instead of the way you are supposed to?" _____

_____

_____

Do you have some actual work examples? What are they?

_____

_____

_____

_____

FOCUS ON THE SITUATION, ISSUE OR BEHAVIOR, NOT ON THE PERSON

Here are 5 statements. **Discuss** which focus on the situation, issue or behavior, and which are generalized comments about the person.

1. "You obviously don't consider it important to keep the customer order requests in order."

2. "I noticed that the customer order requests are still on your desk."

3. "I don't think you really care about the extra work you make for others."

4. "Your attitude is causing a lot of friction around here."

5. "This is the fourth time this week I've had to look for the customer order requests."

WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY

Team – a number of persons associated in work or activity
Teamwork – the work or activity of a number of persons acting in close association as members of a unit

What are the components to a good working team?

Describe as many factors as you can below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

GOOD WORKING TEAM

Now that you have brainstormed and discussed what you consider to be the "ingredients" to a good working team, list which ingredients **exist for you here on the job.**

GETTING YOUR POINT ACROSS

What are some of the **"don't do's"** if you want to get and keep someone's attention and get your point across?

What are the **"do's"**, that is, things that help you get your point across?

Remember:
Use **assertive verbal** and **nonverbal** behaviors.
List some of those behaviors below.

WORK GROUP OR TEAM? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Groups	Teams
Members think they are grouped together for administrative purposes only. Individuals work independently; sometimes at cross purposes with others.	Members recognize their inter-dependence and understand both personal and team goals are best accomplished with mutual support. Time is not wasted struggling over "turf".
Members tend to focus on themselves because they are not sufficiently involved in planning the unit's objectives. They approach their job simply as a hired hand.	Members feel a sense of ownership for their jobs and unit because they are committed to goals they helped establish.
Members are told what to do rather than being asked what the best approach would be. Suggestions are not encouraged.	Members recognize conflict is a normal aspect of human interaction. They work to resolve conflict quickly and constructively.
Members may or may not participate in decisions affecting the team. Conformity often appears more important than positive results.	Members participate in decisions affecting the team but understand their leader must make a final ruling whenever the team cannot decide, or an emergency exists.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUP-CENTERED MANAGERS AND TEAM-CENTERED MANAGERS

Group Centered	Team Centered
Reactive to upper management, peers and employees. Find it easier to go along with the crowd.	Proactive in most relationships. Exhibits personal style. Can stimulate excitement and action. Inspires teamwork and mutual support.
Willing to involve people in planning and problem solving to some extent but, within limits.	Can get people involved and committed. Makes it easy for others to see opportunities for teamwork. Allows people to perform.
Resents or distrusts employees who know their jobs better than the manager.	Looks for people who want to excel and can work constructively with others. Feels role is to encourage and facilitate this behavior.
Controls information and communicates only what group members need or want to know.	Considers problem solving the responsibility of team members.
Ignores conflict between staff members or with other groups.	Mediates conflict before it becomes destructive.
Sometimes modifies group agreements to suit personal convenience.	Keeps commitments and expects the same in return.

TEAM BUILDING EXERCISE

Activity –"Name your department/business"

Refer back to "Work Group or Team? What's the Difference?"

Stay in your group and discuss:

As you worked in your group, do you think you acted more like a work group or as a team?

_____

_____

What are your reasons?

_____

_____

_____

What worked and what didn't work in your group?

_____

_____

_____

SO WHAT DOES CONSENSUS MEAN ANYWAY?

HOW DO YOU GET THERE?

It is...

- Finding a proposal acceptable enough that all members can support it; no member opposes it.

It is not...

- A unanimous vote - a consensus may not represent everyone's first priorities.
- A majority vote – in a majority vote, only the majority gets something they are happy with; people in the minority may get something they don't want at all, which is not what consensus is all about.
- Everyone totally satisfied.

What's needed to get there?

- Time
- Active participation of all group members
- Skills in communication, listening, conflict resolution, facilitating discussions
- Creative thinking and open-mindedness

"WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT FROM THEIR JOBS?"

Individual	Group	Factors	Supervisors	Employees
		High Wages		
		Job Security		
		Promotion in the Co.		
		Good Working Conditions		
		Interesting Work		
		Personal Loyalty of Supervisor		
		Tactful Discipline		
		Full Appreciation of Work Done		
		Help on Personal Problems		
		Feelings of Being In on Things		

REACHING CONSENSUS – CONSENSUS EXERCISE

"What do people want from their jobs?"

Now that you have attempted to reach agreement within your group, stop and think about your impressions of what went on in the group.

Which effective communication skills were used ?

Which effective communication skills could have helped if they had been used?

If you could do it again, would you do anything differently?

REACHING CONSENSUS – CONSENSUS EXERCISE

"What do people want from their jobs?" (con't)

How can you **use** what you've learned **on the job?**

_____

_____

_____

RESOLVING ISSUES WITH OTHERS

- decide what the problem is as you see it
- explain how you feel and why – use facts to describe the situation clearly and calmly
- make your point briefly – be concise
- pause and wait for a response – or ask for the other person's views
- resist the urge to relieve the tension by further explanation
- review the facts and generate alternative solutions
- agree on what each will do to solve the problem

APPROACHING CONFLICT CONSTRUCTIVELY

Tips:

* **Remain** sane even when others are acting unreasonably
* **Listen** carefully
* **Accept** others as worthwhile people
* **Stick** to the present – what the problem is **now**
* **Break** down the conflict into manageable parts
* **Discuss** one issue at a time

Consider the "communication climate":

Defensive – Promote fear; people are "punished" for making mistakes; problems are unnecessarily blamed on individuals; leaders do not welcome feedback from those they lead.

Supportive – Reduce friction; people are encouraged to try new ways of doing things; people are more spontaneous in suggesting solutions and expressing their feelings; all members are treated with respect.

APPROACHING CONFLICT CONSTRUCTIVELY

Read each of the comments and decide if it sounds like a (**D**) Defensive or (**S**) Supportive organizational climate. **Discuss in your small groups**. Place a **D** or **S** next to the statement.

1. Try not to make waves.
2. We haven't tried that, but maybe...
3. The people I supervise are very talented. I like the fact that they can think for themselves.
4. When the equipment breaks down, you have to find out who did it first.
5. I can talk it over with my manager.
6. I let them talk, then I tell them what's what.
7. Try whatever you can to fix it. If it doesn't work, try something else or ask the boss.
8. Make sure your crew knows who is boss.
9. Just tell the managers what they want to hear.
10. They give me enough freedom to get the job done.

THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

Using the examples on the previous hand out as a guideline, think about some actual conflict situations in your job.

List them here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

From our earlier discussion of **healthy vs. unhealthy conflict**, analyze your examples listed above. What might you have done differently in the way you handled yourself? Discuss in your small groups.

We can roleplay any situation you would like help with.

ROLEPLAY SUGGESTIONS...

We have discussed many communication skills which are part of the process of team building, reaching consensus and conflict resolution.

What are some real work situations that have come up or are currently happening that we could roleplay in order to practice those skills and anticipate any problem areas?

CASE STUDY

Recently, Henry, the plant manager was walking through the Production area to get to Receiving. In Production he saw certain areas that seem to be a mess and then saw too much clutter in Receiving which he thought was a safety hazard.

Henry called loudly for Ken (Production supervisor) and Mark (Receiving supervisor) to come to where he stood. Henry began to complain about the mess and safety hazards, wondering why Ken and Mark didn't see this themselves and do something about it.

The next day Henry came by and complimented Ken and Mark for getting things improved.

Roleplay task:

In your small group roleplay this situation. Imagine how Ken and Mark would take this situation to "their" people and add that to your roleplay.

CASE STUDY/ROLEPLAY WORKSHEET

From your roleplay, list examples of good or bad communication.

From your roleplay, list examples of team work potential.

From your roleplay, list examples of resolving conflict in healthy or unhealthy ways.

CASE STUDY

Mary Lou is the supervisor to five employees. It is her first supervisory assignment and she has never had any training in supervisory skills.

Mary Lou has worked hard to assign tasks, set deadlines and solve problems in order to achieve a successful work unit. The poor work skills of two employees, and the constant bickering within the group, however, has caused delays and personal frustration for everyone. Instead of being out on the floor more often, Mary Lou seems to remove herself by staying in her office area.

Make a list of your suggestions below. Then we'll discuss this as a group.

GETTING EMPLOYEES INVOLVED IN SOLVING PROBLEMS

Many supervisors spend too much time solving problems that could be better handled by individuals. When supervisors feel responsible for solving all the problems, production is slowed, employees are frustrated, and personal growth is limited.

Team effectiveness is more easily achieved when the supervisor simply participates in problem solving rather then dominating it.

Can you think of examples where you or your supervisor didn't involve the employees in problem solving?

Looking back do you think it would have been helpful to get their input? Why?

TEACHER NOTES
TEAM BUILDING –
"NAME YOUR DEPARTMENT OR BUSINESS"

Divide into small groups.
Have several index cards prepared with 3 or 4 initials for a meaningless acronym.

Group task: Give one member of each group an index card. Explain that they are a new department or business. This is the acronym for the department/business. As a group, decide what the letters stand for and be ready to describe what your dept./business does.

Process:

- Roles people assumed.
- Any non-participants? Why?
- Did anyone solicit the ideas of the quiet ones?
- Did anyone try to restrain someone who was dominating?